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ABSTRACT

This project began with a list of the kinds of topics that would be of most interest in a study of the old west. Some of the topics that were mentioned for the project included Lewis and Clark, Native American tribes and nations, early pioneers, the fur trade, Texas independence, the Pony Express, homesteaders, gunfighters, the Indian wars, and Wild West shows. The project then required each student to select a category and a specific aspect of that category for special study. Whole class participation in the project included the planning and construction of a picture map, other art activities, and discussions. History and English teachers collaborated on several project activities. For example, English teachers used the project's bibliography for outside reading credit, while history teachers used oral reports from the students' areas of specialization to communicate subject matter. Other project activities included skits and role playing. As a culminating activity, the project used district music teachers and the university music professors and librarians to help with a list of period songs. The project's unit required 30 fifty-minute class periods for its completion. The preparation and presentation of oral reports took seven days. An activities outline is provided, as is an extensive list of selected topics. Contains 48 references. (BT)

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AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PROJECT AND THE AMERICAN WEST

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AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PROJECT AND THE AMERICAN WEST

Teachers and students in history and English classes recently sat down to talk about their favorite nonfiction books. Conversation turned to books about the Old West. Teachers and students mentioned The West, edited by William C. Davis and Joseph G. Rosa; The Old West, by the editors of Time-Life; America's Historic Places, by the editors of Reader's Digest; The Truth About Geronimo, by Britton Davis; The Authentic Wild West, by James D. Horan; The West: An Illustrated History, by Geoffrey C. Ward; Pioneer Trails West, edited by Don Worcester; "It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A History of the American West, by Richard White; and The Best of the West, by Tony Hillerman. Popular periodicals included True West, Old West, Frontier Times, The American West, Western Historical Quarterly, Journal of Negro History, Journal of American Ethnic History, and American Jewish History. Students and teachers agreed that it would be interesting to take a new approach to the study of the settling of the West.

The project began with a list of the kinds of topics that would be of most interest to the students in a study of the West. Students and teachers listed dozens of possibilities on the board. Topics included Native American tribes and nations, Lewis and Clark, and the early pioneers and explorers; the Mountain Men, fur trade, and Texas independence; the early settlers, riverboats, and immigrants; the gold rushes, vigilantes, Wells Fargo, and Pony Express; the stagecoach, Texas Rangers, and Comstock Lode; the buffalo hunters, homesteaders, sodbusters, and railroads; the cattle trails, cowtowns, gunfighters, and peace officers; the Indian wars, range wars, land rushes, and Wild West shows.

Participants soon saw the need for some additional organization. As a consequence, students grouped the topics into seven categories of interest. The categories included the early frontiers (crossing the Appalachians, the trailblazers, beaver trade, and Texas independence), the Far West (the wagon trains and gold rushes), linking the East and West coasts (the expressmen, rivermen, and railroads), Manifest Destiny (the plains tribes and Indian wars), working the range (the cattle kingdoms and cowboys), culture and society (the cities, towns, gamblers, and gunfighters), and the end of an era (the logging industry and the Alaskan frontier).

PROCEDURES AND RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER SUBJECTS

Each student selected a category and a specific aspect of that category for special study. Half the class focused on the frontier between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River, 1776 to 1845, while the other half focused on the Far West, 1845 to 1898. Students used class mediators (and sometimes a draw of the hat) to get student areas of specialization spread out over the different categories. Students also put together a bibliography of relevant references and resources. Citations for books and periodicals in the school library were put on index cards for easy sorting. Other resources included CD-ROMs, audio and video cassettes, and the Internet.

The entire class participated in the planning and construction of a picture map to show, among other things, the routes and means of transportation west. The art teacher offered the services of her class. Students began by covering a large bulletin board with paper. They then used an overhead projector hooked up to a computer and CD-ROM player to get an image of the United States. Inks and paints were used to trace in boundaries, rivers, lakes, oceans, and other features. Discussions determined the addition of other items to the map. An initial pencil tracing marked the routes and the placement of pictures. Because the art students supervised the addition of the inks and paints, the mural was moved regularly back and forth between the history and art rooms.

The completed map showed the rivers that became the highways for pioneers moving west. Early backwoodsmen followed trails like the Warrior's Path, a single-file footpath worn by the travel of Indians. Roads and settlements followed the frontiersmen. The Wilderness Road, as shown on the picture map, ran through the Cumberland Gap and across Kentucky. The Old Walton Road ran through the hills of Tennessee. Zane's Trace cut across the Ohio River basin. The emigrants of the mid eighteen hundreds had a choice of trails leading west. The principal route, as shown on the map, was the Oregon Trail, which began in Independence, Missouri. A spur of the California Trail scaled the Sierra Nevada and ended in Sacramento. The Mormon Trail led to the Salt Lake Valley. The main route to the Southwest was the Santa Fe Trail, which linked up with the Gila River Trail and the Old Spanish Trail. The major express routes to the West for mail, freight, and passenger travel generally followed the paths of early pioneers and traders. The Central Route, as shown on the map, was used by freight trains, by the riders of the Pony Express, and by stagecoaches. The Oxbow Route ran south to San Diego. It was followed for part of the way by the "Jackass Mail" and the Butterfield stagecoach line.

History and English teachers collaborated on four activities. English teachers used the project's bibliography for outside reading credit. History teachers used oral reports from the students' areas of specialization to communicate subject matter. Written reports based on the oral reports went to the English teachers. Students illustrated their reports and included footnotes and a bibliography. Teachers bound these reports and used them for public display. Students also participated in ten-minute dramatizations of a topic. Groups of students role-played the parts of two or more characters identified with a problem typical of the time period. Students researched their parts and wrote dialogue. After several short rehearsals, students presented their work to the class.

Students suggested that their skits reflect their map. One group focused on the kinds of problems that were associated with an emigrant's need to move a load of supplies by packhorse and wagon along the Cumberland Road during the 1820s. Another group focused on the kinds of

problems that were associated with using the Erie Canal during the 1830s and the Ohio River during the early 1840s to transport goods and people from one place to another. Several groups re-enacted scenes from the 1840s and 1850s and travel by wagon to Oregon and to the western gold fields. Two groups focused on the Union Pacific Railroad and transportation during the 1870s. The people of a particular place or time had reasons for wanting to move west. Students brought these reasons out. In addition, the routes and means of transportation were discussed as were the people, customs, and culture of the era.

As a culminating activity, students asked the district music teachers and the university music professors and librarians for help with a list of period songs. Research on the songs turned up some interesting information. The Irish folk tune that Thomas Moore used for "Bendemeer's Stream" was heard in the Cumberland mountains as "Hog Drovers." The settling of the Midwest was celebrated in songs about the new states, to include "The State of Arkansas," "The State of Illinois," and "Kansas Boys." The westward crossing of the Great Plains was described in "Sweet Betsey From Pike." A hymn, "He's the Lily of the Valley, the True and Risen Lord," furnished the tune for "My Little Old Sod Shanty on the Plain." Settlers also sang "Greer County Bachelor." "Casey Jones" gave rise to songs about Casey Jones the gold miner and Casey Jones the railroad worker. "Sidney Allen," the brave mountaineer, was another "Casey Jones" spinoff. The Gold Rush was described in "Days of '49," "The Banks of the Sacramento," and "What Was Your Name in the States?" The Irish street song "The Old Man Rocking the Cradle" became a familiar cowboy song with the lines "Whoopie ti yi yo, get along little dogie." "The Streets of Laredo" was about a cowboy dying of a gunshot wound. The old hymn, "Follow the Risen Lord," became the well-known slave song "Follow the Drinking Gourd." From work gangs in southern prisons and from laborers building the railroads came the rhythmic Negro work songs, to include "Told My Captain" and "Another Man Done Gone." The unrest that brought about the social reform movement at the end of the nineteenth century was reflected in the Populist song "The Farmer Is the Man That Feeds Them All." Students were also interested in "Jesse James," "The Cowboy's

Lament," "Little Joe the Wrangler," "The Old Chisholm Trail," "My Old Kentucky Home," "Elanoy," "The Erie Canal," and the gold rush parody of "Susannah." Students studied the words and verses to these songs for their relevance to the westward movement. Students also tried to sing as many of these songs as they could.

TIME REQUIREMENTS AND RESOURCES

The unit required thirty, fifty-minute class periods for its completion. The preparation of a bibliography and the location of other references and resources took three days. Students spent part of this time organizing topics into categories of interest. The preparation and presentation of oral reports took seven days. The preparation of maps, models, and other visuals took five days. The use of the Internet, CD-ROMs, and cassettes took three days. The preparation and presentation of skits took eight days. Research on the period songs took three days.

Teachers used the Social Studies School Service (http://SocialStudies.com) in Culver City, California, to get audio and video cassettes and CD-ROMs for the project. America's Westward Expansion showed the westward movement from 1783 to the Civil War. Archival images illustrated the problems of a new nation, the Louisiana Purchase, displacing Native Americans, Texas expansion, the Oregon Trail, and the Mexican War from the perspectives of the individuals involved. The West, produced by Ken Burns for the Public Broadcasting System, showed the clashing of interests and cultures as America expanded west. The Wild West used primary sources (letters, journals, diaries, and newspapers), the traditional songs of the era, paintings, sketches, and archival photographs to conjure up images of the cowboy, settlers, gunfighters, townspeople, Indians, and soldiers of the period. American Journey was a repository of letters, journal entries, essays, speeches, legislation, photographs, drawings, and maps. Also included were audio clips of period music and speeches. American History Through Narration and Song highlighted the social and political history of the westward movement. An Audio Visual History of American Folk

Music combined archival illustrations with authentic music to examine the cultural roots and lyric history of American music. Our Heritage of American Folk Songs featured on-screen lyrics for many popular tunes. Represented were songs of the cowboys, mountains, plains, railroads, pioneer, Western frontier, Mississippi Valley, and old Southwest, to include "Shenandoah," "Git Along Little Dogies," "John Henry," "The Erie Canal," "Acres of Clams," "Oh, Susannah," and "The Texas Rangers."

Students also searched the Internet for information. Search phrases included American westward expansion, American Old West, and American westward expansion and folksongs and ballads. Westward Expansion Links for American History (http://pwnetwork.pwcs.edu/wshs/westexpan.html) and The American West (http://www.americanwest.com/index.htm) were popular with students. Students also used other more specific words and phrases to search for information for their written and oral presentations.

PROJECT BENEFITS AND OUTCOMES

Students benefitted in many ways from their participation in this project. They had the opportunity to make choices in the selection of a topic and in the preparation of that topic for presentation to the class. They had the opportunity to plan and to work together and to use a variety of technologies, references, and resources. They had the opportunity to write a research paper and to develop a bibliography. They had the opportunity to develop their own unique talents and interests. They could build models or paint and draw or sing or use their verbal talents to write or speak. They had the opportunity to make judgements about the historical value of a piece of evidence, and they had the opportunity to simulate the experiences of the emigrants in the westward expansion of the United States. In short, the cognitive and affective outcomes of the project were self-evident. Students continued to show an interest in the history of the American West well past the end of the unit.

As a guide to expectations, teachers gave the following outline of activities to each student:

The Frontier and Westward Expansion

I. Organizing themes

A. Early frontiers (crossing the Appalachians, the trailblazers, beaver trade, and Texas independence)

B. Far West (the wagon trains and gold rushes)

C. Linking the East and West Coasts (the expressmen, rivermen, and railroads)

D. Manifest Destiny (the plains tribes and Indian wars)

E. Working the range (the cattle kingdoms and cowboys)

F. Culture and society (the cities, towns, gamblers, and gunfighters)

G. End of an era (the logging industry and the Alaskan frontier)

II. Methods, techniques, and strategies

A. Required reading

1. Page references in textbooks

2. Targeted reading for area of specialization

3. General outside reading from bibliography for English credit

B. Reports

1. Oral report in history class to reflect area of specialization

2. Typed report for English class from area of specialization, to include footnotes and bibliography

C. Illustrated book--to be made of assembled written reports and kept for public display, reference, and review

D. Picture map for history and art classes

E. Special maps, models, and pictures for reports and skits

F. Dramatic skits--to be worked out in small groups with the help of history and English teachers and presented in both classes

G. Period songs for research and for singing

Some of the topics selected for oral and written reports included the following:

George Rogers Clark and the capture of Kaskaskia, Illinois; Chief Blackfish and the attack on Boonesborough, Kentucky; Alexander MacKenzie and the Canadian West Coast; General Anthony Wayne and the Battle of Fallen Timbers; Thomas Jefferson and the Louisiana Purchase; Lewis and Clark and the Corps of Discovery; Zebulon Pike and the sighting of Pikes Peak; John Colter and the phenomena of "Colter's Hell"; Manuel Lisa and the Missouri Fur Company; the Independence and the advent of the steamboat; slavery and the Missouri Compromise; Stephen F. Austin and the struggle for Texas; freight and the prairie schooner; William H. Ashley and the Yellowstone River; David Douglas and the Douglas Fur; Jedediah Smith and the South Pass; Andrew Jackson and the Indian Removal Act; Nathaniel Wyeth and the Oregon Trail; Joseph Walker and the Yosemite Valley; John C. Fremont and the Far West; California and the Bear Flag revolt; the Donner party and the Sierra Nevada; Brigham Young and the Mormon Trail; John Sutter and the discovery of gold; San Francisco and the "Committee of Vigilance"; Allan Pinkerton and the Pinkerton detectives; Alexander Todd and the American Express Company; Thomas Fitzgerald and the Fort Laramie conference; the Saluda and the perils of steam; the Indian and the Kansas-Nebraska Act; Richard King and the King Ranch; mail and the Butterfield (Oxbow) route; silver and the Comstock Lode; St. Joseph and the Pony Express; Theodore Judah and the Central Pacific; Ben Holladay and the Concord stagecoach; land and the Homestead Act; Colonel John M. Chivington and the Sand Creek massacre; Crazy Horse and the Fetterman massacre; Black Kettle and the Washita River incident; Promontory Summit and the Last Spike; John Wesley Powell and the Grand

Canyon; Esther Morris and the women's rights movement; Dodge City and the Kansas cattle towns; Samuel Colt and the Peacemaker; Isaac Charles "Hanging Judge" Parker and the law west of the Mississippi River; Custer and the Little Bighorn; Ephraim Shay and the Shay locomotive; Wyatt Earp and the O.K. Corral; Oscar Wilde and the Western stage; Granville Stuart and the Stuart "Stranglers"; General George Crook and the surrender of Geronimo; P. J. Kepplinger and the gambler's trade; Sitting Bull and the Hunkpapa Sioux; Bob Womack and the mother lode; John Muir and the Sierra Club; and Joseph Juneau and the Silver Bow.

The project required thirty to forty hours of work every week from teachers. Though the demands of the project were often overwhelming and, at times, frustrating, teachers still seemed to gain a sense of satisfaction from their efforts. Students seemed to share a similar sentiment. They were happy, and they enjoyed the opportunity to guide their own learning. All agreed that the project had been a success.

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